

### Preface

Jordan, Peter

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## Preface

The Working Group on Central Europe [Arbeitskreis Zentraleuropa] of the German Geographical Society [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geographie, DGfG] is mainly devoted to the networking of geographers from Central European countries, but also to presenting and discussing geographical issues and projects of a transboundary character in this wider region. The region comprises certainly Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. But also geographers engaging in research on Central Europe in countries outside this region are always welcome. The Working Group is thus fundamentally international and for this very reason also (German/English) bilingual. Up to 2017, the speaker function of this Working Group was always in the hands of Austrians, i.e. Elisabeth Lichtenberger, Heinz Fassmann (both University of Vienna and Austrian Academy of Sciences) and Peter Jordan (Austrian Academy of Sciences). In 2017, Sebastian Kinder (University of Tübingen) took over.

Just to convey some impressions of the range of topics discussed in this Working Group (WG) so far, its activities since 2007, when Peter Jordan assumed the speaker function, may briefly be presented. In most cases these were workshops in the framework of German Congresses for Geography [Deutsche Kongresse für Geographie, earlier: Deutsche Geographentage].

Thus, in the framework of the German Congress for Geography in Vienna [Wien] in 2009, such a workshop was devoted to “Regional change in Central Europe – trans-border projects and project ideas”. Corresponding to the very general theme, the topics presented were very diverse, but the meeting contributed a lot to networking and project planning with and between geographers from countries that had found themselves as new European Union members after the two eastern enlargements of 2004 and 2007.

The next WG workshop in 2011 took place in Zadar, Croatia, as a separate event, since a German Congress for Geography was not organised in this year. The workshop was hosted by the University of Zadar and saw presentations and discussions on the concept of Central Europe, in which not only geographers, but also historians took part.

The next workshop in 2013 was again arranged within a German Congress for Geography, i.e. the congress in Passau, Germany. In a political environment of growing uncertainties as regards the development of the EU and further European integration after the global economic crisis and the financial crisis of Greece it was asking the question: “Central Europe – Driving force of European integration?”

The next workshop in conjunction with the German Congress for Geography 2015 in Berlin discussed new developments in the rural space of Central Europe taking into account the critical situation of rural space especially in the former Communist countries. It resulted in proceedings published by the Institute of Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.<sup>1</sup> Emilija Manić, Svetlana Popović and Žaklina Stojanović (Belgrade [Beograd]) present there the characteristics and problems of rural space of an entire country by the example of Serbia. Aleksandar Lukić and Petra Radeljak Kaufmann (Zagreb) describe the conceptual framework for an interdisciplinary, scenario-based study of rural space in Croatia – another successor country of Yugoslavia characterised by small-scale subsistence farming as well as by significant rural depopulation especially in the Dinaric mountain range as well as in the coastal belt. Johannes Huemer and Vera Kapeller (Vienna [Wien]) analyse new settlement and housing developments in the Austrian-Slovakian border region, where Bratislava’s suburbia proceeds across the border. Marcin Wójcik (Łódź) highlights the Polish initiative “Network of the most interesting villages” aiming at raising awareness of the problems of rural space. He hints at the cultural heritage still present there and at the possibilities of activating endogenous potentials. Paulina Tobiasz-Lis (Łódź) investigates the image rural dwellers have of their own village by asking them to draw freehand sketches and present photographic essays. Karolina Dmochowska-Dudek (Łódź) and Maria Bednarek-Szczepańska (Warsaw [Warszawa]) highlight the “Not in my backyard” (NIMBY) syndrome by the example of rural areas in Poland. Kinga Xénia Havadi Nagy, Oana-Ramona Ilovan (Cluj-Napoca) as well as Doris Damyanovic, Florian Reinwald and Mandy Mărginean (Vienna [Wien]) plead for participatory rural development in the sense of involving inhabitants and local actors and activating in this way local social capital.

The last workshop so far was arranged in conjunction with the German Congress for Geography in Tübingen, Germany, in 2017 and highlighted the topic “Cultural landscapes as identity anchors”. It saw ten paper presentations from eight countries, three of which found their way to this special issue of “Europa Regional” that may with some justification thus be called proceedings of the workshop.

<sup>1</sup> JORDAN, Peter (ed.) (2017): New Developments in the Rural Space of Central and South-East Europe. Proceedings of the meeting of the Working Group on Central Europe in conjunction with the German Congress of Geography, Berlin, September 30, 2015 (= ISR-Forschungsberichte, 43). Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 150 p.

The workshop was – from a cultural-geographical perspective – devoted to the question, what sub-national medium-size historical-cultural spatial units (landscapes, regions), especially those that do not correspond to current administrative units, are meaningful for space-related identity of persons and communities today. Empirical studies confirm that geographical features of this kind rank (again) high among space-related identities especially of the younger population.

This leads to interesting questions: Is this a reaction to the homogenising tendencies of globalisation? Do national identities thus fall into the background? Can cross-border regions of this kind reduce the importance of country borders and (again) of national identities? Can common regional consciousness in a multicultural region inside a country function as an umbrella identity, while ethnic/national identities rank second?

A second range of questions arises from the reference point of spatial identity. Is it based on a historical period, positively experienced and favourably embedded into the collective memory? Do linguistic peculiarities such as distinct dialects serve as identity anchors? Do ethnic/national minorities provide for the specific colouring and play herewith the role of the main point of reference? Is it the result of other cultural elements such as traditional architecture or food and drinking cultures? Or is it the landscape in its entirety reflecting the impact of culture, but also including natural characteristics?

Central Europe is a treasury in this respect, hosting many examples such as Romanian Transylvania [Ardeal], the cross-border region Banat, the Slovenian landscapes Carniola [Kranjska], Coastland [Primorska] and Styria [Štajerska], the Croatian landscapes Istria [Istra], Dalmatia [Dalmacija] or Slavonia [Slavonija], the Czech cultural landscapes Bohemia [Čechy], Moravia [Morava] and Silesia [Slezsko], Spiš in Slovakia, Silesia [Śląsk] or Galicia [Galicja] in Poland, Western Ukraine and the today Ukrainian-Romanian Bucovina [Bukovina/Bucovina], then Kurzeme or Latgale in Latvia, Austrian landscapes and ‘quarters’ such as Innviertel, Mühlviertel or Waldviertel and, of course, landscapes in Germany such as Franconia [Franken], Upper Palatinate [Oberpfalz] or Lusatia [Lausitz].

Facing these questions and challenges, the three papers making up this volume provide for interesting answers. Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš (Zagreb) and Branimir Vukosav (Zadar) under the title “Landscapes of identities – Multiculturality of the borderlands” hint at first at the fact that Croatia has for centuries been a zone of cultural contacts, conflicts and exchanges, that have caused its prominent multiculturality. Within the past 500 years for instance, it was an area of contact/conflict of several European and Eurasian political forces, cultures and traditions. Thus, its borderlands underwent frequent depopulation, repopulation and cultural change that eventually led to the formation of a distinct (regional) consciousness. The perception of dissimilarities and ‘otherness’ of minorities in relation to the dominant population has, however, also created different identities

related to the same space. Shared space thus does not necessarily mean shared identity. This is a major conclusion of this article employing the method of deconstructing the symbolism of historical maps.

Oana-Ramona Ilovan (Cluj-Napoca), Cristina-Georgiana Voicu (Iași), and Alexandra-Maria Colcer (Cluj-Napoca) explore in their paper titled “Recovering the past for resilient communities. Territorial identity, cultural landscape and symbolic places in Năsăud town, Romania” the efforts of local and regional identity building in the north of Romanian Transylvania. This identity building is based on the historical fact that town and land of Năsăud were part of the Military Frontier District of Năsăud (1762-1851), the northernmost section of the Austrian Military Frontier along the south-eastern fringe of the Austrian Empire against the Ottomans. It is a historical fact remembered by historiography of the former Vallachian, now Romanian majority population as a fortunate period, since the Austrian administration had established a Vallachian regiment as the protector of this region. This meant quite a difference to the structure of powers in the Principality of Transylvania under Ottoman sovereignty and earlier that saw Hungarian nobility, German Saxons and the Hungarian-speaking community of Szeklers as rulers, while Vallachians, later called Romanians, were just the powerless and marginalised ground layer of the society. It meant also a difference to the period after the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and up to World War I, when Transylvania including the District of Năsăud was exposed to direct Hungarian rule. The article hints thus at the possibility of using historical resources for local and regional identity buildings and proves by a questionnaire survey and other research methods that this possibility has in the case of Năsăud been used quite successfully.

Paulina Tobiasz-Lis, Marcin Wójcik, Karolina Dmochowska-Dudek, and Pamela Jeziorska-Biel (all Łódź) by their contribution titled “Towards a ‘place’: the countryside awaking. Cases from Poland” finally highlight the view that from the perspective of cultural transformation in rural areas in the post-Communist period it is crucial to empower local communities and thus reinforce social and territorial identity. The aim of the paper is to analyse good practices in mobilising and coordinating local resources and energy, residents’ creativity and personal engagement, supported by external incentives. The selected cases of Sierakowo Sławieńskie in Western Pomerania [Województwo zachodniopomorskie] and Masłomęcz in the Lublin voivodship [Województwo lubelskie] show that residents’ initiatives achieved exceptional effects by strengthening relationships between people and space. In both villages specific assets of the environment were identified to develop new anchors of local identity. In this way place has been ‘created’ and adjusted to the needs of the local community as well as for visitors. In both cases, identification and use of specific resources was of key importance, combined with important external incentives and support such as process creators

(experts) and possibilities of financing the entire initiative (e.g. EU funds).

This special issue of “Europa Regional” owes its existence not only to the authors, but also to Sebastian Lentz, director of the

Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography [Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde], who invested much interest in our workshop and gratefully offered publishing its results, as well as Evelin Müller, managing editor of this prestigious journal.

***Peter Jordan, Vienna [Wien]***